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ABSTRACT

A study examined and described a program to improve writing skills and related attitudes of elementary school students. Targeted population consisted of second- and fifth-grade students in a stable, middle class suburban community, located 20 miles southwest of Chicago, Illinois. The problems of underdeveloped writing skills and lack of student interest were documented through writing checklists, rubrics, teacher journals, and student surveys. Professional literature suggested a variety of causes for this deficiency--inadequate teacher training and reliance on ineffective past practices could be factors. There was a need for the integration of writing skills across the curriculum to make the process relevant and meaningful for students. Daily time constraints, as well as a lack of immediate and positive feedback also contributed to the problem. Overreliance on audio and visual means of communication affected student interest in writing. A review of solution strategies suggested by professional educators, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a writer's workshop approach, which employed a variety of instructional strategies designed to develop writing skills and improve student attitudes. Post intervention data indicated that the second-grade students made significant gains in the areas of writing mechanics, organization, and focus. Data also indicated that fifth graders made significant gains in the areas of using conventions correctly and using details to support main ideas. (Contains 34 references and 21 figures of data. Appendices present survey instruments, rubrics, student writing samples, peer editing checklists, writing prompts, and graphic organizers.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS AND RELATED ATTITUDES AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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Site: Tinley Park, Illinois
Submitted: May 8, 1996

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Abstract

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Site: Tinley Park I

Date: May 8, 1990

Title: Improving Writing Skills and Attitudes Through a Writers Workshop Approach

This report describes a program to improve writing skills and related attitudes of elementary school students. The targeted population consists of second and fifth grade students in a stable, middle class suburban community, located twenty miles southwest of Chicago, Illinois. The problems of underdeveloped writing skills and a lack of student interest were documented through writing checklists, rubrics, teacher journals, and student surveys.

Professional literature suggested a variety of causes for this deficiency. The lack of adequate teacher training and reliance on ineffective past practices could be a factor. There was a need for the integration of writing skills across the curriculum to make the process relevant and meaningful for students. Daily time constraints, as well as a lack of immediate and positive feedback also contributed to the problem. Over-reliance on audio and visual means of communication affected student interest in writing.

A review of solution strategies suggested by professional educators, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a writers workshop approach, which employed a variety of instructional strategies designed to develop writing skills and improve student attitudes.

Table of Contents

		Page
Abstract		i
Chapter		
1	Problem Statement and Context	1
	General Statement of Problem	1
	Immediate Problem Context	1
	The Surrounding Community	3
	Regional and National Context of Problem	4
2	Problem Evidence and Probable Cause	6
	Problem Evidence-Second Grade	6
	Problem Evidence-Fifth Grade	9
	Probable Cause (site based)	12
3	The Solution Strategy	17
	Review of Literature	17
	Project Outcomes and Solution Components	21
	Action Plan for the Intervention	22
	Methods of Assessment	26
4	Project Results	27
	Historical Description of Intervention	27
	Presentation and Analysis of Second-Grade Results	29
	Presentation and Analysis of Fifth-Grade Results	38
	Conclusions and Recommendations	45
References Cited		49

Appendices

Appendix A - Teacher Checklists for Writing 53

Appendix B - Writing - Grade 2 Scoring Rubrix 54

Appendix C - Writing Interests 55

Appendix D - Writing Survey 56

Appendix E - Teacher Survey 57

Appendix F - Status of the Class 58

Appendix G - Parent Letters 59

Appendix H - Second - Grade Parent Surveys for Students 60

Appendix I - Rubric for Assessment of Student Writing Samples 61

Appendix J - Rubric for Assessment of Poetry 62

Appendix K - Reflections on Writing 63

Appendix L - Self Evaluation Checklist 64

Appendix M - Proofreader's Checklist 65

Appendix N - Things I Can Do As a Reader 66

Appendix O - Peer Editing 67

Appendix P - Peer Editing 68a, 68b

Appendix Q - Student Writing Sample 69

Appendix R - Fifth Grade Final Prompt 70

Appendix S - Fifth Grade Final Prompt 71

Appendix T - Reflections on Writing 72

Appendix U - M. Ideas for Writing 73

Appendix V - Student Work Log 74

Appendix W - Graphic Organizer 75

Appendix X - Graphic Organizer 76

Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

Targeted students in grades two and five exhibited a need for improved writing skills and related attitudes. Evidence for the existence of this problem includes teacher observations, writing samples, assessment of the writing process, and student reflection.

Immediate Problem Context

There are 432 students enrolled in the targeted K-6 school. The school community is located in a middle class suburban community 20 miles southwest of Chicago, Illinois.

The student population is predominantly White non-Hispanic, 96 percent. The remaining student population is comprised of 2.3 percent Hispanic and 1.6 percent Asian-Pacific Islander. Low income families make up 3.2 percent of the enrollment with limited English-proficient student enrollment at 2.3 percent. The attendance rate is 96.8 percent with no evidence of chronic truants and no retentions or expulsions. The student mobility rate during the year was 4.1 percent (Community Consolidated School District 146, 1994b).

The school employs 29 certified teachers, six of the twenty-nine are employed to service special education students. Sixty-six percent of the certified teachers have earned or will receive a Master's Degree within the next year. The average years of teaching experience is approximately 14.7. The school also employs one social worker, one speech therapist, and one English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teacher. The school has eight teaching aides and is administrated by the building principal with support personnel including one school secretary, one registered nurse, and two custodians (R.J. Gardner, personal communication, April 14, 1995).

The facility is a one-floor modified open-space building that opened in May, 1972. The flexible floor plan allows for 18 classrooms built around a large multi-media center

There is also one kindergarten room, a gym/lunchroom, a music room, and a computer lab.

Five small enclosed rooms provide office space for support staff. With the exception of the gym, the entire facility is carpeted; interior classrooms have no windows. The building is one of two schools in the district that is totally air-conditioned.

The school day begins at 9:00 A.M. and ends at 3:00 P.M. The students are grouped in heterogeneous classes. These classes contain cluster groups of inclusion students, gifted students, and students who are learning English as a second language with a student-teacher ratio of nineteen to one. The primary program incorporates a thematic, whole language approach; health, science, and social studies are integrated in all units. The math program is language-based. Elements of these approaches are incorporated in the upper-grade curriculum which uses the basal text; however, the students are exposed to many additional activities that are not included in the basal text program.

This is the second year that students with special needs have been included in the regular classroom. Special Education services are provided to 41 students, or 9.4 percent of the student enrollment. There are six children enrolled in the multi-needs inclusion program. The rest of the 35 students are enrolled in the learning-disabled inclusion program. English-as-a-Second Language services are provided to less than one percent of the student enrollment (CCSD 146, 1994a).

The gifted students in grades one through six participate in challenging activities through Opportunities and Resources for Enrichment, the school district's gifted program. The enrollment for the program is 108 students, or 24.8 percent of the student population. While these students are considered the focus, participation in the program is open to all students who exhibit mastery of targeted skills at their grade level (CCSD 146, 1994a).

Students receive report cards four times a year. At the end of the first and second quarter grading periods, the school calendar provides time for parent/teacher conferences.

The PTA is very active within the school community with many parents volunteering their time to assist teachers both inside and outside the classroom. Money is raised to provide additional educational materials and cultural arts programs for the students. Parents, faculty, and administration all work together for the benefit of the school children.

The Surrounding Community

The school is located within a community first settled by German immigrants in the mid-1800's. What was once a farming community is now a busy suburb of over 26,000 residents (Nolan, 1995). Many of these citizens work in the nearby city of Chicago.

An employment profile for the community indicates that 26 percent of those employed hold managerial or professional positions, thirty-six percent work in technology, sales, or administration.

Eighty-four percent of the population are high school graduates. Sixteen percent have earned a bachelor's degree, and six percent attained a graduate or professional degree.

Single-families primarily live in over 7,000 of these dwellings. Multifamily housing units number below 2,000. The median home value is $124,400, and the median family income is $44,099 (CACI Inc., 1998).

The people are community-minded citizens and have worked together in the past to raise funds in order to replace outdated police equipment. Local businesses have a strong history of support for community organizations.

Residents have access to institutions of higher learning located in the community. Classes are available through South Suburban College, Governors State University, De Paul University, and Chicago State University. A heavy demand for evening classes indicates interest shown by the local population in continuing education (Nolan, 1995).

The targeted school is one of six schools which constitute a Community Consolidated School District. Four of these schools are located in Tinley Park, one is in

Orland Park, and the targeted school is located in Oak Forest. All schools are within the boundaries of Cook County and serve a total of 2,463 students (CCSD 146, 1994b).

The racial make-up of the students within the district is 95 percent White non-Hispanic, two percent Asian-Pacific Islander, two percent Hispanic, and less than one percent Black non-Hispanic. Low-income enrollment is five percent, and the district attendance rate is 96 percent (CCSD 146, 1994b).

The administration of the school district is comprised of a Board of Education, a superintendent, and support staff. This staff consists of an assistant superintendent for program and staff development, a director of special services, an assistant superintendent for business affairs, a supervisor of buildings and grounds, and individual building administrative staff.

The school district is currently developing and implementing a project entitled Education 2000. Student goals and outcomes have been identified. Benchmarks were established, and instructional units are being developed. The purpose of this undertaking is to develop an educational program which will better prepare students to meet the challenges of a global society in the 21st Century (CCSD 146, 1994b). Many parents and members of the community have taken an active interest in Education 2000. The district holds annual community forums in order to communicate progress on this forward looking project. In additions, updates are included regularly in school newsletters and quarterly school district publications. The Education 2000 Project steering committee meets annually to review input from all sources (CCSD 146, 1994a).

Regional and National Context of Problem

In a review of current literature devoted to children's writing performance, Rich (1994), notes that a need for improved writing skills in the elementary school is required and states

> Like riding a bike or driving a car, writing takes a lot of practice--and most of our students and their parents before them in school have not gotten enough practice at writing. That much is clear from the most recent "Writing Report Card" from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which showed that fewer than 20 percent of American students can write a well-developed and detailed essay in response to a short assignment (p. 20).

This issue was also addressed by Graves in the forward to Atwell's In the Middle. According to Atwell (1987), America has been concerned about students' performances in reading and writing for many years. Research states that students' scores are remaining the same, or dropping. Slight gains have been noted by students in the elementary grades, however, once they enter the middle and senior high school years, little progress is made in improving these skills. Overloaded curricula make it difficult for teachers to spend enough time with students and their failures compound in lowering their self-esteem. Although students' scores in these areas remain adequate, many problems still remain.

Regardless of the supposed causes or related issues, the problem of underdeveloped writing skills is a serious concern, and it is one which warrants the consideration of educators everywhere. The US Department of Education (1990), reported:

> Unfortunately, many schools are unable to give children sufficient instruction in writing. There are various reasons: teachers aren't trained to teach writing skills, writing classes may be too large, it's often difficult to measure writing skills, etc. Study after study shows that students' writings lack clarity, coherence, and organization. Only a few students can write persuasive essays or competent business letters. As many as one out of four have serious writing difficulties. And students say they like writing less and less as they go through school (p. 3).

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

Site based information to support problem evidence was gathered from four targeted settings (two 2nd-grade classes with two 5th-grade classes) the first full week of school. A total of 38 second-grade students and a total of 43 fifth-grade students were asked to complete a writing interest survey and a writing assignment. The survey and writing samples were used to construct baseline data.

Problem Evidence - Second Grade

In early September, the targeted second grade students were asked to respond to a teacher-directed writing prompt. The students were asked to write a five sentence paragraph describing their summer vacation. They were reminded to use capital letters and periods. The time allotted for this prompt was thirty minutes. Not all students needed the specified amount of time to complete the assignment.

Skills were assessed using the Teacher Checklist (Appendix A) and the Writing Rubric (Appendix B). The levels of proficiency are indicated using a number system of one (1), two (2), and three (3). A number three indicated a high level of proficiency, a two showed an adequate level, and a one was used for low level of proficiency.

Writing skills were organized into three categories: Mechanics, Organization and Focus. The figures that follow indicate the results of this assessment.

Figure 1

Writing Mechanics

Skill	1(Low)	2(Ave)	3(High)
Capitalization	34%	59%	13%
Punctuation	47%	21%	32%
Sentence Structure	66%	29%	5%
Spelling	13%	63%	26%

Figure 1 shows that in the area of writing mechanics, the second-grade students had the most difficulty in writing a complete sentence (sentence structure). Students also demonstrated a low skill level using punctuation. Although many students used correct capitalization, a third of the group demonstrated a low level of capitalization use. Spelling appears to be an area of strength, but the students were allowed to used invented spelling and spelling was graded according to readability.

Figure 2

Writing Organization

Skill	1 (Low)	2 (Average)	3 (High)
Good Lead	21%	58%	11%
Logical Sequence	47%	34%	21%
Appropriate Ending	82%	9%	11%
Descriptive Details	58%	39%	3%

n=28

Figure 2 shows that the targeted students demonstrated very low proficiency in composing an ending which brought closure to their work. Their writing also contained

few descriptive words to enhance the meaning of their composition. Additionally, students' writing frequently lacked a sequential format.

A majority of the second-grade students demonstrated an adequate ability to begin their piece with a good lead-in sentence. Overall, students' writing was poorly organized.

Figure 3
Writing Focus

[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

[illegible]

Figure 3 indicates an overall strength in the area of focus. The majority of students' writing demonstrated a high level of focus. Most students' writing also included consistent perspective. The researchers concluded that this skill needs less emphasis than organization and mechanics.

Additional evidence to document the need for improved writing skills was based on teacher observation during writing. It was obvious that one area of difficulty was the students inability to begin a written task. Student comments indicated confusion about initial writing procedures and little confidence in their ability to proceed.

We observed several students who were apparently ready to write but hesitated to begin. Spelling concerns inhibited these students' progress. They were reluctant to use invented spelling even though the teachers encouraged them to do this before the writing prompt was initiated. Some wanted to use a word that they didn't know how to spell and

were willing to wait for help rather than continue writing their piece.

Failure to reread work or check for errors was observed. Students turned in work and asked the teacher, "What do I do now?" "I'm done." These students lacked the skills needed to self-edit and required teacher guidance.

Group sharing time provided more opportunities for the teacher to observe and note other problem areas. Lack of punctuation inhibited the readability of the writing piece. Meaning was lost when the sentences blended together or were fragmented. Another difficulty observed during this time was the students' inability to read their own work. Spelling errors caused fluency to suffer and understanding was affected.

A writing interest survey (Appendix C) was given to 2nd-grade students early in September. Students were asked to complete several statements regarding their attitudes toward writing. Sample responses to the sentence stem, "Writing is . . .", included writing is "fantastic", "wonderful", "something I like a lot", "fun", "cool", and "awesome." Another sentence stem, "I'd rather write than . . .", prompted responses such as, I'd rather write than "sleep", "get stung by a bee", "clean my room", "eat chicken", "do computers", and "stare out the window."

The findings on the interest survey indicated a very high interest and enjoyment of writing in our targeted group. Out of the thirty-six students surveyed, thirty-four indicated a positive response to writing and two students indicated that writing was "boring."

With a 94 percent positive response to the statements on the interest survey, the researchers concluded attitude toward writing is not an area of concern at this grade level.

Problem Evidence-Fifth Grade

A student writing interest survey (Appendix D) was administered to the targeted fifth-grade population during the first week of September, 1995. Students were asked to best match their attitudes to five questions regarding writing (i.e. "When I think about

writing at school I feel: a. excited b. okay c. I'd rather be doing something else d. frustrated)

Students were generally apathetic toward the writing process. When it came to writing at school, 83 percent of the students said they felt frustrated, okay about writing, or would rather be doing something else. When it came to writing at home, 90% of the students expressed similar feelings.

Eighty-one percent of the students were reluctant to share their work before an audience regardless of its make-up. The same number of students were excited about having their work published.

During the first week in September, fifth-grade students were given a narrative prompt whose assigned subject dealt with writing about an exciting personal experience. No time limit was involved but students generally took 30-45 minutes to complete the prompt. The prompt was scored on a possible 4 point scale: a score of 1 indicated a lack of competence, a 2 indicated occasional competence, a 3 indicated frequent competence, and a 4 denoted thorough competence.

Figure 4

Student Writing and Main Idea

Main Idea is...	Score 1	2	3	4
Clear and maintained	39%	35%	26%	0%
Supported with specific details	42%	28%	26%	4%
Presented logically (along with details)	46%	28%	20%	4%

n=43

Surveyed students clearly had much difficulty expressing a clear main idea and logically supporting it with specific details. Nearly 70 percent of these students either

lacked competence or demonstrated only minimal competence in these areas

Figure 5

Student Use of Writing Conventions

	Score			
	1	2	3	4
Correct punctuation is used	26%	42%	28%	4%
Correct spelling is used	16%	51%	26%	7%
Correct capitalization is used	16%	49%	28%	7%
Correct sentence structure is used	26%	40%	33%	1%

n=43

In each of the convention categories, over 65 percent of the students had scores of either "1" or "2" (i.e., competence was either lacking or minimal). Frequent use of run-on sentences accounted for much of the poor showing in the sentence structure category. On the positive side, over 30 percent of all students demonstrated frequent to consistent competence in the convention areas measured.

Figure 6

Student Writing Creativity

	Score			
	1	2	3	4
Creative use of words and ideas	26%	48%	26%	0%

n=43

Student work exhibited a disappointing amount of creativity. Over seventy percent

of the students had creativity scores of either a "1" or a "2," and most surprisingly, not one student achieved the highest score of 4 in this area.

Teacher observation during these prompts suggested further improvement is needed in even more areas of student writing. Students frequently chose topics which were personally relevant but which did not relate to the assigned topic. Most students writing lacked organization and clearly would have benefited from the use of outlines or graphic organizers. Finishing the assignment quickly was of utmost concern to many students who made little to no effort in applying self-editing and self-evaluation skills.

Probable Cause (site based)

Information to support probable cause was gathered from the staff of the targeted school. A total of 17 classroom teachers, kindergarten to sixth grade, completed The Teacher Survey (Appendix E). The survey questions were developed from the concerns addressed by the US Department of Education(1990). As mentioned in Chapter 1, research indicates that students are not given adequate instruction in writing and that teachers are not prepared to teach writing to their students. Formal writing consists of the writing of essays that follow the persuasive, narrative, and expository models.

Also measured was how well teachers felt their college education prepared them for writing instruction. Lastly, these teachers were asked if they desired more time to teach writing within the school day.

Listed in Figure 7 below are the results of the survey designed to measure the amount of time devoted to the teaching of writing skills.

Figure 7

SURVEY QUESTIONS CONCERNING TIME
DEVOTED WEEKLY TO TEACHING WRITING SKILLS
AND TIME STUDENTS SPENT WRITING

QUESTION	WEEKLY	PERCENT OF STAFF
1. . . me devoted to teaching w[illegible]ng skills	1 hour or less	59%
	2 hours - 4 hours	29%
	5 hours plus	12%
2. Time students spend on formal writing (e.g. narrative, expository and persuasive)	1 hour or less	29%
	1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hours	35%
	3 hours	18%
	4 -5 hours	18%
3. Time students spend writing on all types of writing	1 1/2 hours or less	35%
	2 1/2 - 3 3/4 hours	41%
	4 - 5 hours	24%

n=17

No single conclusive generalization can be extrapolated from questions number 1 to 3. Certainly more time needs to be devoted to teaching writing skills when 59 percent of the surveyed teachers report spending an hour or less per week on such instruction. Although formal writing is strongly emphasized in our district, only 36 percent of all surveyed teachers have their students spending three hours or more a week on such writing. Additional contradictory information is revealed by question number 3. In Graves' forward of Atwell's book (1987), he suggested spending a minimum of 3 hours per week on writing workshop and 65 percent of our surveyed staff claim to have had their students writing well within this range (1 1/2 to 5 hours).

Figure 8 reports the results of the survey related to the issues of teacher training and daily writing instruction.

Figure 6

SURVEY QUESTIONS CONCERNING COLLEGE
PREPAREDNESS IN TEACHING WRITING AND ATTITUDES
TOWARD ADDITIONAL WRITING TIME

QUESTION	RESPONSE	PERCENT OF STAFF
4. As a teacher were you well prepared to teach writing?	yes	18%
	no	82%
5. Do you wish you had more time to teach writing?	yes	65%
	no	35%

n=57

Questions number 4 and 5 reveal the survey's most convincing data. Over 82 percent of surveyed teachers describe their college preparation as being inadequate when it comes to teaching writing. When 65 percent of those same teachers wish they had more time to teach writing, it's obvious that teachers want more time to teach writing and also want to be properly instructed on how to do so.

Probable Causes (literature-based)

A review of educational literature indicates there is a general lack of writing ability among today's students and suggests several possible causes for this shortcoming. In both 1983 and 1985, Illinois students were, on the average, found to have increasingly inadequate writing skills (Illinois State Board of Education, 1987).

Probable causes for this inadequacy are numerous. Hull (1989), suggests that for American teachers and students, it is the best of times and the worst of times, the best of times for several reasons. Teachers and students have the advantage of current research on the writing process, the availability of technology as a communication tool in the classroom which elicits higher level thinking among students. The teacher's role is now that of a facilitator of information within the classroom setting. This worst of times is portrayed by the high percentage of students exiting school without the literacy skills necessary to lead productive lives. Furthermore, schools do not yet value the contributions made by various cultures in our society. This is evident in the curricula being taught.

According to Routman (1991), classroom writing must be relevant to students if they are to enjoy and value the process and to grow as writers. Consequently, skill sheets and isolated activities do not produce good writers. Additionally, writing quality is negatively affected when a teacher's efforts are directed towards identifying minor errors in writing (US Department of Education, 1980). This same report suggests that class size and the difficulty in measuring writing skills also contribute to inadequate writing skills. Instead of identifying errors, a teacher should focus upon providing positive feedback regarding a student's writings. Diederich (1974) suggests that any positive responses (either from teachers or peers) produce superior writing results. Inversely, it appears that a lack of positive feedback would have a negative or neutral effect upon writing quality. On a grander scale, Schaeffer (1987) suggests that although "most teachers are concerned with the final product of writing - the story, the essay, the report - but have little understanding of the process that successful writers use in creating the final product" (p. 11).

Schaeffer goes on to suggest that the steps required in good writing (i.e., modeling, guided practice...) are lacking in most classroom instruction. Noted journalist and local news reporter, Chuck Ginnie (1995) bemoans the poor quality of writing evident in letters

he has received from teenagers. He suggests, in his speeches to students, that knowing how to write is the most important skill to learn. Weiner (1990) suggests that a probable cause can be attributed to the media's pervasive influence on America's youth. There is no doubt that television, movies, video units, and stereos are making the written word in some sense antiquated. Letter writing has been replaced with cassettes or telephone calls. Colleagues on the staff of the targeted school confirm this through their own experiences. It is a common practice for some people today to leave recorded telephone messages in lieu of a written thank you note.

Review of literature and the site-based research concur that students' writing skills need to be improved. Both researchers and experts agree that writing is an important life-long communication skill.

Chapter Three

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Current literature regarding the need for improved writing skills uncovered a variety of possible solutions. One of the most commonly suggested solutions is the writing workshop approach to teaching writing that, according to Atwell (1987), involves four key routines: the mini-lesson, the writing writing workshop itself, the group share meeting, and the status of the class conference. It is evident that the following are needed by student writers: regular assigned periods of time when writing is done, suggested as well as original subjects for writing, time when mechanics are taught within the context of the assignment, good adult writing models to use as a guide and time to read as well as write. The California Department of Education (1982), working in cooperation with the Bay Area Writing Project also identified several of these practices as effective.

Graves (1979) identifies instruction in the writing process to be a key element of any writing program. This process involves brainstorming, writing a first draft, revising and editing, and finally publishing. Hennings (1986) believes that through the writing process students are truly learning to write. The brainstorming procedure can involve factoraming or the categorizing of ideas. Students can then mold and shape their thoughts through the first draft and revision steps. When students share their writing with an audience, whether sharing is oral or written, they experience the added pleasure of being recognized as writers.

Helping students to brainstorm and organize can be done through the use of graphic organizers. With graphic organizers, abstract information can be represented in a visually concrete form giving students the opportunity to elaborate on their ideas. According to Rico (1983), a very effective prewriting activity is semantic mapping or "clustering." Additionally, Forgarty and Bellanca (1991) offer numerous graphic organizers to aid in the

writing process.

Research also indicates that writing must be relevant to a student's life. Yates (1983) believes writing carries ideas from one person to another, has a distinct purpose and audience, and is based on meaning. Students need to develop a sense of audience and purpose and to see writing as a relevant act that occurs between themselves and their classroom or society. Diaries, journals, and logs allow writers to record events and thoughts for future reference and elaboration (Walley, 1991; Johnston, 1992). Routman (1991) concurs that relevancy is vital to the writing process. "The writing that goes on in classrooms must be relevant to students if they are to become engaged in and value the process" (p. 170). Graves (1994) strongly agrees, stating, "Unless we show them how to select topics from the ordinary events of their own lives and expand them into fiction, an essay, or a personal narrative, they can only draw on the experiences of others, which they do not necessarily understand" (p. 45).

Like any effective approach to teaching the language arts, writing workshop should be a process integrating other areas of the curriculum. Students should be encouraged to write about social studies or science or any other subject for that matter. As Wagner (1985) suggests, "A good way to integrate language arts is to focus on something else-the study of flight, or cats or the water cycle or energy-giving foods, or Boston in 1773 for example." Research indicates that such an integrated approach to teaching language arts not only improves achievement (Hillocks, 1984), but is also more efficient and effective because one subject matter aids in learning another (Roehler, 1981). In addition to integrating the curriculum, writing workshop should provide students with the opportunity to write in natural contexts about topics that are personally meaningful (Read, 1971; Bissex, 1980).

Writers need frequent practice. Research confirms the value of keeping a journal

"Writing about their experiences, wishes, dreams and feelings allows young students to think and talk on paper" (Adelman, 1985). This activity encourages them to write at their own pace, shaping ideas into words, free of criticism. Journals can be an outlet for emotions, frequently providing insights for the teacher. Since journals are not evaluated, they are often regarded as a safe place where students can express themselves freely. When a student chooses to share his or her journal, class members are encouraged to respond. Regular postive feedback about the success of their communication is vital to their continuing development.

Experts believe it is important to establish a classroom climate where new ideas can be experimented with during frequent opportunities for writing. Fear of mistakes or problems should not inhibit attempts to construct an initial draft. At this point, the focus should be on content. In the forward of Adelman's (1985) Writing and Thinking A Program Approach Wagner states, "Form, handwriting, mechanics, and spelling all come into focus after the generation of ideas is complete." These skills, while unheralded, are necessary to complete the process. Shields (1996) concurs. "Many times when something I've written isn't clear, the problem is grammar."

According to Pflaum (1986), it is important for outside readers to add another perspective to a writer's work. Therefore, it is necessary for students to learn and practice the process of peer editing. Not only does this activity teach editing, but is also allows the writer to expand the sense of audience. Beginning writers need to realize that the teacher as sole audience and evaluator is a limited experience. It is important for students to become actively involved in each other's work and to figure out how improvements can be implemented into a writing piece. As Graves (1983) put it, "Through conversation, I can see issues more clearly or from a different viewpoint than I had attained on my own." When students realize that their peers do not understand their writing, they become determined to

figure out what is missing from their work. Students must be taught the peer editing process and a successful method is teacher modeling. By stressing the skills taught in writing class, a teacher can focus on these points for corrections.

Tardt et al. (1983) indicates, that studies reveal that students involved in peer evaluation improve as writers more dramatically than students not exposed to this process. Following this practice of peer editing students can better critique their own writings. In Teaching Writing in K-8 Classrooms, he states, "Although self-evaluation is the most difficult of the evaluative procedures, it should be emphasized since it is this essence of writing that will accompany the students when they leave the classroom "(p. 215).

The American educational system is undergoing rapid change. Learner outcomes have become a driving force in curriculum development and educators are beginning a new era in the assessment process. The focus is on alternate assessments as a means of assuring that the students will successfully attain the newly adopted educational outcomes.

Student portfolios are just one example of the current assessment alternatives. The portfolio may refer to a compilation of individual student work or it may become the assessment system for the teacher. Burke (1994) supports the current research on portfolio assessment, "A portfolio contains several separate pieces that may not mean much by themselves, but when compiled together, they produce a more accurate and holistic portrait of the student" (p. 44).

A portfolio is very useful to a teacher because it is a collection of student work that reflects the students' efforts and progress. Graves (1983) recommends the the writing portfolio has several purposes. Each folder should contain the pieces the child has written, ideas for future pieces, and a record of skills learned. Students assist in selecting the contents, and are given the opportunity to self-reflect on their own accomplishments. Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters (1992) identify the two main issues related to criteria for

portfolio scoring "(1) What are the criteria selecting the samples that go into the portfolio and (2) What are the criteria for judging the quality of the samples?" (p. 72) The portfolio helps to create a partnership between the teacher and student. They are working together to create a meaningful educational assessment.

The state of Illinois (Illinois State Board of Education, 1994), recognizes the need for instruction in the area of mechanics, organization and focus as well. The state goal for writing declares, "As a result of their schooling, students will be able to write standard English in a grammatical, well-organized and coherent manner for a variety of purposes" (p. 4). These skills can be addressed within mini-lessons as well as during the revision process, both are basic components of the writing workshop.

Our review of the literature indicates that writing workshop should be a valuable tool in improving student's writing skills and attitudes. This approach will be the major theme behind our action research plan and its components.

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

As a result of using the writing workshop program during the period of September , 1995 to January, 1996, the targeted students in grades 2 and 5 will improve their writing skills as measured by teacher observation and reviews of students portfolios.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective of improving writing skills the following processes are necessary.

1. A physical climate that promotes good writing will be established within the classroom during the first week of school.

2. Lesson plans incorporating writing workshop activities will be developed weekly. These will include mini-lessons, students' writing, individual conferences and group sharing.

3. Teacher documentation processes will be established. These include a daily

teacher journal, maintenance of student portfolios, and the use of rubrics for assessment during student conferences.

4. Students will take an active role in documenting skills learned through mini-lessons and individual conferences. At regular intervals they will be asked to reflect on their own writing.

Action Plan for the Intervention

This action was designed to be a guide in the daily operation of the writing workshop at both the second and fifth grade levels. It is based on Atwell's (1987) model of the writing workshop. Modifications have been made to suit the particular site, student population, and individual teachers styles involved in the study.

A. Establish a physical climate and room arrangement

1. Set up room to promote writing and sharing

a.) Arrange classroom furniture

b.) Cluster student desks

c.) Provide area for small-group conferencing

d.) Provide area for large-group sharing, meeting, etc.

e.) Provide an "author's chair"

f.) Provide space for storing writing folders

2. Gather motivational, inspiration, and educational materials for display

a.) Display posters defining or illustrating different types of writing

b.) Display posters with motivational messages

3. Gather a variety of reading materials

a.) Provide area with a variety of books available

b.) Provide published student books or materials

c.) Provide magazines, newspapers, etc.

4. Create a bulletin board to display student writing

B. Set up components of the writing workshop

1. Set up a regular time for writing

a.) Conduct writing workshop 3 to 4 days a week

b.) Plan mini-lessons (short teacher directed lessons targeting a particular skill) to be 5 to 10 minutes in length

c.) Allow 20 to 40 minutes for teacher-directed or free writing (student chooses topic) while teacher confers with individuals

d.) Engage in a 5 to 10 minute large group sharing where 2 or 3 children read their writing and elicit responses

2. Provide mini-lessons. Topics include

a.) Procedural issues, such as the operation and management of the writing workshop

b.) Strategies writers use such as discovering different topics and types of writing and techniques for writers that facilitate the writing process: brainstorming, first draft, conferencing, revising, final draft, and publishing

c.) Qualities of good and effective writing, such as a good opening, staying on topic, following a logical sequence, creative work choice, eliminating clutter and a good conclusion

d.) Skills, including those conventions of English usage that are important to help readers with meaning such as correct punctuation, verb tense, subject verb agreement, and complete sentence

e.) Sharing of the teacher's own writing and writing experiences to illustrate struggles and successes (first mini-lesson shows the teacher as a writer)

3. Make certain students have necessary supplies. Each student should have

a.) Sharpened pencils

b) Loose-leaf paper or notebook

c) Writing folder and portfolio

d) Grade 2 Wordbook (a mini-dictionary of commonly used words that can be added as needed)

e) Teacher made booklets to be used for monthly journals

4 Provide time for students to writer while teacher monitors and confers with individuals or groups

a) Introduce or review procedures

i) Fifth-grade students will be given time to review ongoing work before writing workshop begins

ii) Teacher will begin with "Status of the Class" report (Appendix F)

b) Circulate with checklist to keep track of students teacher has not met with

c) Note needs of individual students

d) Encourage students, and give guidance where needed

e) Prior to conference with teacher, student will self-edit work then follow with peer editing

f) Schedule editing conferences for completed pieces of writing

g) Keep ongoing work in the student's writing folder

h) Collect student folders at the end of each writing workshop period

5 Provide large group sharing time after writing

a) Allow 2 or 3 students the opportunity to share their work

b) Encourage responses by the class as modeled by the teacher

c) Maintain a positive climate that allows students to feel that their writing is valued

C Establish Teacher Documentation Process

1. Keep a daily teacher journal

a.) Include anecdotal records regarding individual student's progress as well as general reactions to the day's writing

b.) Meet with grade level team to discuss notes taken at least once a week

2. Maintain writing portfolio

a.) Determine criteria for choice of entries

b.) Send portfolios home at the end of each quarter for parent feedback. (Appendices G and H)

3. Evaluate student writing

a.) In grade 2, teachers will use teacher checklist (Appendix A) and writing rubric (Appendix B) to evaluate selected writing samples

b.) In grade 5, teachers will use rubrics (Appendices I and J) to evaluate student writing

D. Establish Student Documentation Process

1. Design documents for student use

a.) Use student self-reflection sheet at second grade on specific pieces of writing (Appendix K)

b.) Use self-editing sheet at fifth grade upon completion of first draft (Appendix L)

c.) Use proofreaders checklist at second grade (Appendix M)

d.) Provide student with sheet to indicate skills learned to be stapled in writing folder (Appendix N)

2. Use student peer-editing sheet as needed (Appendices O and P)

The classroom will be set up to provide the students with the opportunity to work alone, with a partner, or in a small group. The teacher will be actively involved with instruction, record keeping, and student conferences. The daily focus on instruction and an

emphasis on writing activies with choice of topics may well have a definte impact on the children's writing skills and attitudes this year

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, evidence of specific writing skills will be evaluated within the concept of student-writing samples. These samples will be derived from student's writing as a result of prompts provided by the teacher (Appendices Q, R, and S). Scoring rubrics will be developed and interviews with students will be held as part of the assessment process (Appendices B and I). In addition, portfolios of student work will be kept throughout the intervention period. These will contain selections of student work that illustrate the progress being made. The students will select their favorite piece, reflect on it, and set goals for improvement (Appendices K and T). At the end of the second quarter, the second grade students will take home the portfolios for review by parents. A parent evaluation sheet, (Appendix H) will be included with a request for written feedback.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The terminal objective in this action plan addressed the writing skills and attitudes toward writing of the targeted 2nd and 5th-grade students. Research, surveys, portfolios and teacher observation were instrumental in the development of the writing workshop procedures that would be used by the researchers to accomplish this objective.

The researchers began by administering writing interest surveys to the targeted 2nd and 5th-grade students during the first week of September, 1995. This data was used to determine student attitudes toward writing. The next step was to have students write to a prompt. Second-grade students were asked to write about their summer vacation. Fifth-grade students were asked to write a paper describing one of their most exciting experiences. The writing prompts were graded using a writing rubric developed by the researchers. Results were used to determine skill areas that needed to be addressed during the intervention period.

Organizational meetings were held to determine topics to be covered in the writing workshop. The researchers determined that there was a need to address the areas of mechanics, organization and focus at the 2nd-grade level. Research at the 5th-grade level revealed students needed to improve in the following areas: 1) expressing a clear main idea and supporting it with specific details, 2) exhibiting creativity in their work, and 3) writing complete sentences (as opposed to sentence fragments and run-ons).

The researchers made modifications in the physical organization of the classroom to promote writing and sharing. Motivational and instructional materials were displayed within the classroom and a variety of reading materials were made available to the students. Bulletin board space was made available to display student writing.

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Second-grade students began keeping a monthly journal early in the year. Booklets for this purpose were provided for students to record their own feelings and thoughts, a record of school activities, current events, and daily personal experiences. These journals were sent home at the end of each month for students to share with their families. Fifth-grade students kept a writing folder for writing work. Students were given several forms to be kept in their writing folders. Form A (Appendix U) allowed the students to list possible writing topics. Students used form B (Appendix V) to record titles of both completed pieces and work in progress, as well as progress made in writing process (e.g. brainstorming, prewriting, first draft, editing, etc.). Writing skills acquired through mini-lessons and writers workshop sessions were recorded in Form C (Appendix N).

A plan was developed to conduct writing workshop three to four days each week. At the 2nd-grade level, however, the researchers found that the workshop time specified in the action plan required an adjustment in the schedule. Writing workshop was held two or three days a week. At both grade levels mini-lessons were devised to address writing skills, strategies and techniques. Steps in the writing process--brain storming, first draft, editing, revising and publishing--were modeled for the students. At both grade levels, time devoted to the writing workshop process and its stages often exceeded those times outlined in the action plan. Teacher modeling and student involvement in the lessons were reasons for this increase of time.

During student writing, the teachers observed and conferred with individual students, encouraging them and giving guidance when needed. Sharing time was an integral part of writing workshop. Students read their pieces and received feedback from their peers as well as the teacher. The number of students participating in group-share at both grade levels often exceeded the action plan's recommended two to three students.

Students were instructed in self-editing and peer-editing techniques. Both

strategies were used during the intervention period. The researchers kept anecdotal records in their teacher's journal regarding student progress. The daily teacher journals were modified to follow the writing workshop schedule. Writing portfolios were maintained. Students were asked to reflect on their work. In second grade, portfolios were sent home for parent involvement and feedback. Selected student writing was evaluated using grade level checklists and rubrics. Portfolios in the fifth grade consisted of student selected pieces from their writing folder. Students were asked to reflect as to why they chose a particular piece for their portfolio.

Presentation and Analysis of Second-Grade Results

The writing prompt that was given to thirty-eight 2nd-grade students in the early fall provided information regarding student ability in the writing process. Writing skills were organized into three categories: mechanics, organization and focus. Collected data showed that in the area of mechanics, the 2nd-grade students had difficulty in writing a complete sentence, as well as using correct capitalization and punctuation. Spelling appeared to be an area of strength but it must be noted that inventive spelling was allowed unless it inhibited the readability of the piece.

Second grade students showed a lack of proficiency in the area of organization. The skills tested included a good lead, logical sequence, appropriate ending and descriptive details. Eighty-one percent of the students tested scored low on writing an appropriate ending.

Although, the targeted students showed some strength in the area of focus, improvement was needed in staying on topic. Over 80 percent scored "high" in using consistent perspective in their writing and 74 percent were proficient in using correct verb tense.

Following the intervention period, the students were asked to respond to a

teacher-directed final prompt. Thirty-seven students were directed to write about a memorable winter experience. The prompts were graded using the same rubric used for the initial prompt. The data collected from the final assessments are shown in the figures that follow.

Figure 9
Writing Mechanics (second grade)

Skill	1(Low)	2(Ave)	3(High)
Capitalization	14%	41%	45%
Punctuation	8%	35%	57%
Sentence Structure	11%	46%	43%
Spelling	3%	70%	27%

n=37

Figure 10
Writing Organization (second grade)

Skill	1(Low)	2(Ave)	3(High)
Good Lead	14%	43%	43%
Logical Sequence	3%	30%	67%
Appropriate Ending	16%	41%	43%
Descriptive Details	0%	86%	14%

n=37

Figure 11
Writing Focus (second grade)

Skill	1(Low)	2(Ave)	3(High)
Topic	3%	11%	86%
Perspective	0%	0%	100%
Verb Tense	0%	19%	81%

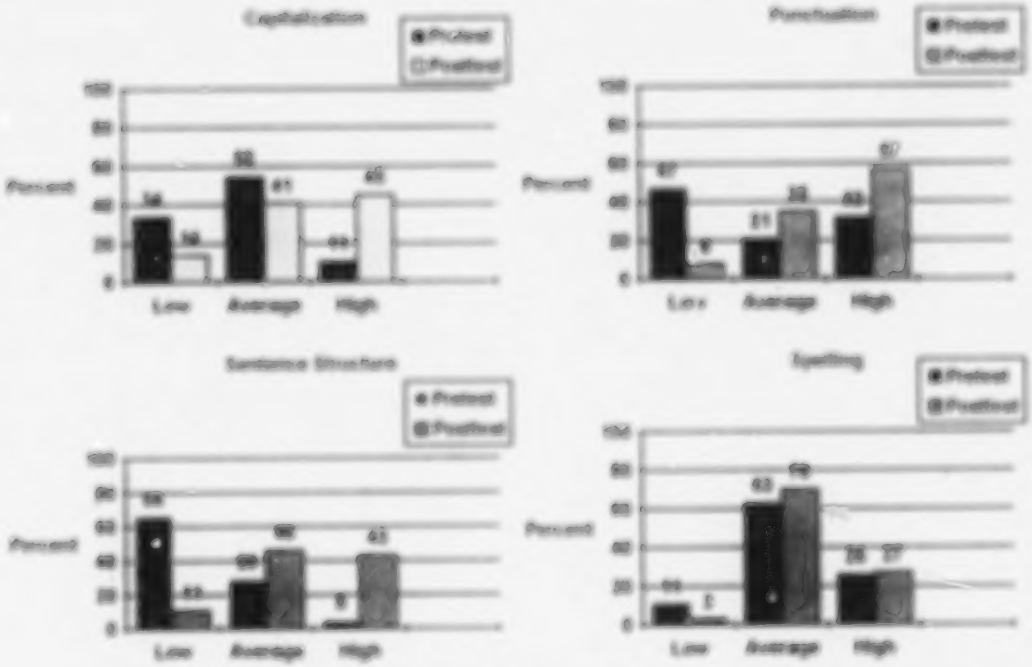
n=37

Figure 9, Writing Mechanics, shows that at least 86 percent of the students scored average to high in the tested areas. In Figure 10, the overall results for Writing Organization indicate 84 percent of the 2nd-grade students scored in the average to high zone. The data in Figure 11 indicates that 97 percent of the students scored in the average to high range.

In order to assess the effects of the writing workshop intervention a comparison was made between scores from the initial and final prompts. The figures that follow illustrate progress made in specific writing skills by the targeted 2nd-grade students between the months of September, 1995 and January, 1996. Figure 12 compares the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores for capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Figure 12

Writing Mechanics - Second Grade



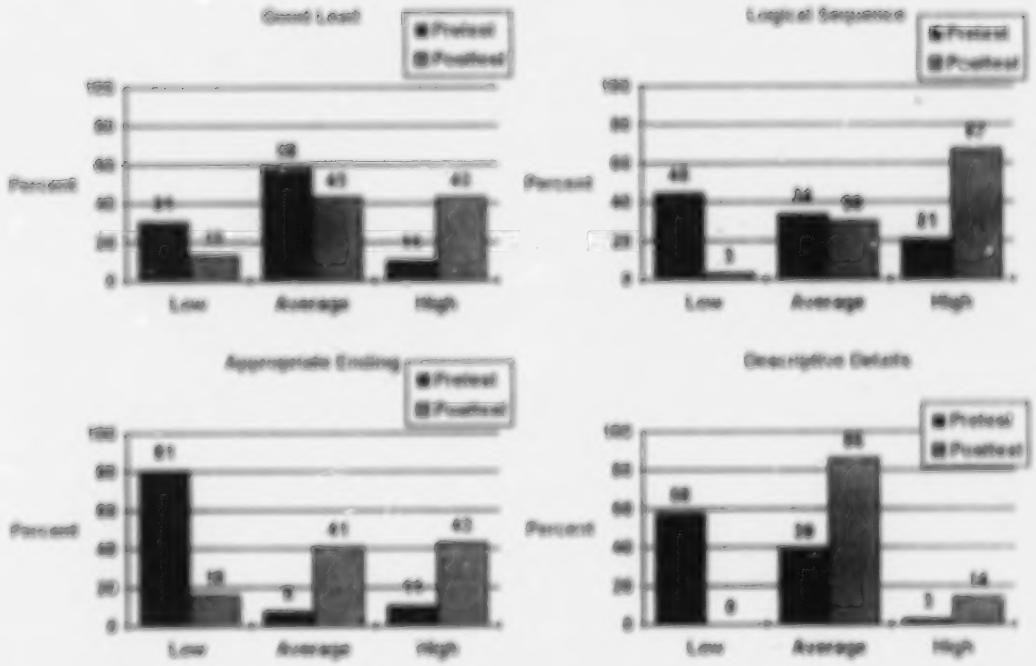
The most notable change appears to be a drop in the number of low scores and a rise in the number of high scores. Initially, 11 percent of the students scored high in capitalization. Following the intervention, 45 percent were in the high range, a 34 percent increase. In September, with 47 percent of students scoring low, punctuation was obviously a weak area. By January, only 8 percent scored within that range, a drop of 39 percent. A more dramatic change occurred in the area of sentence structure, where there was a 55 percent decline in the number of students scoring low. Test results in spelling indicate only minor improvement. Researchers placed less emphasis on this skill, allowing the use of inventive spelling for most assignments.

The next figure, Figure 13, presents results of student performance in writing organization. Percentages indicate substantial gains in the use of good lead, logical

sequence, appropriate ending, and descriptive details

Figure 13

Writing Organizations - Second Grade

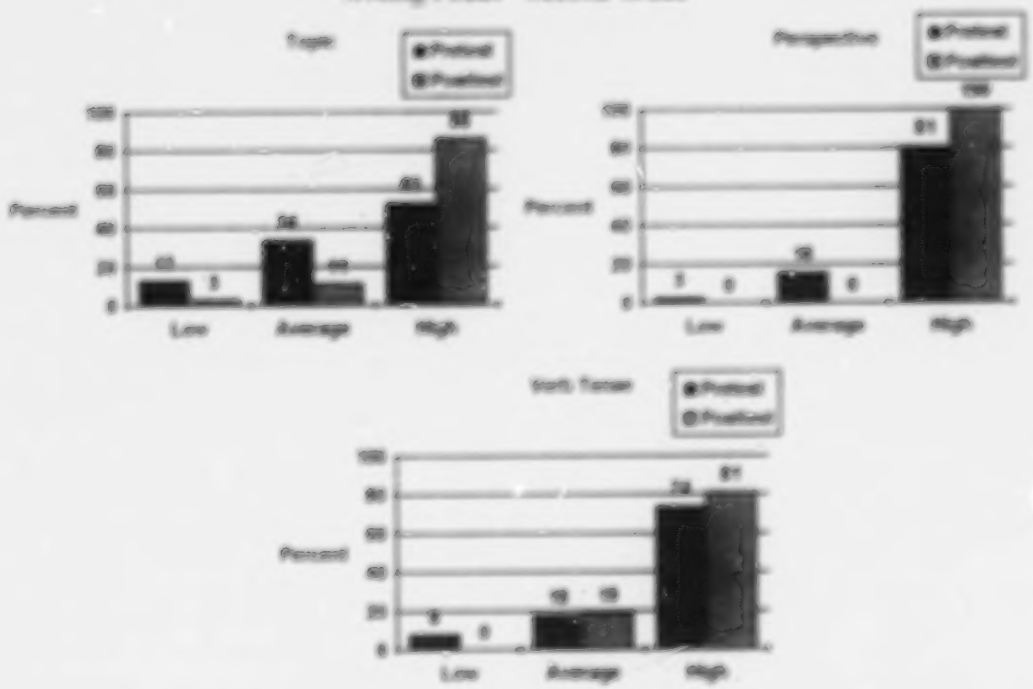


Students' performance in beginning work with a good lead-in sentence shows an increase of 32 percent of high scores. Test results in logical sequence show an even greater improvement with a 46 percent ascent in the high range. An unparalleled drop of 65 percent in the low scores was evident for writing appropriate endings. Substantial gains are seen in the use of descriptive details. Low scores plunged by 58 percent while the average scores rose by 47 percent.

The outcomes for writing focus are presented in Figure 14. Student deficits in this domain were not as pronounced prior to the intervention.

Figure 14

Writing Focus - Second Grade



Student scores registered 33 percent growth in the high sector for staying on topic. More modest gains were observed in both writing perspective and verb tense. Analysis of data collected from both the *initial* and final writing prompts confirms overall improvement in the areas of mechanics, organization, and focus.

Another method of assessment used to evaluate the effects of the intervention was student self-reflection. The targeted 2nd-grade students were asked to assess their own progress by reviewing the contents of their portfolios and completing the *Reflections on Writing* form (Appendix K).

Students were asked to complete the sentence, "When I look back at the work I have done, I feel _____." They were directed to circle the symbol which represented their feeling about their writing. Thirty-four students chose the happy face.

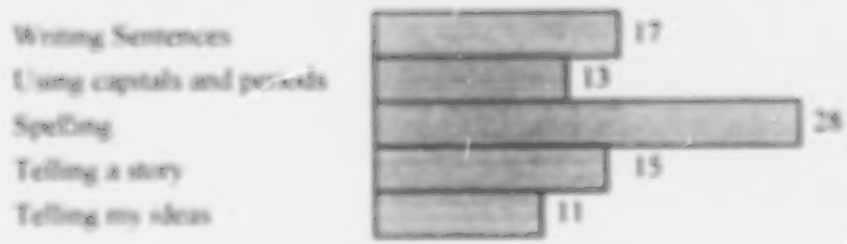
and three selected the face indicating "OK." No one chose the sad face.

Next, students were asked to select one or more specific areas where they felt they had shown improvement. The following figure reveals these results.

Figure 15

Reflections on Writing - Second Grade

I have gotten better in ...



n=37

Twenty-eight out of thirty-seven students chose spelling as an area of improvement. Almost half of the students believed they were getting better at writing sentences and telling a story. Fewer students thought they had improved in telling their ideas about something.

Researchers noted a discrepancy between these results and the findings disclosed in Figure 12. Those findings reveal little improvement in spelling scores while the students believed they were attaining success in this domain.

Students chose their favorite writing piece from the contents of their portfolios to complete the sentence, "I am really proud of _____." Personal preference revealed a wide variety of topics involving home and school.

The final item addressed on the self-reflection form related to future work. In completing the sentence, "Next time I write, I will _____," students were instructed to list areas they felt needed improvement. Many students wanted to upgrade their work.

by writing longer and better sentences and by adding more details and ideas. One student's comment, which was typical of others, stated that he would like to "write a longer story, write longer words, use a lot more telling words." Other students wanted to improve spelling and printing. Some students even recognized the need to, "write faster," and "not waste time."

Overall, the researchers found the self-reflections to be positive in nature. The students appeared to give serious thought to the task. They enjoyed reviewing their work and observing their own growth in writing.

At the end of the second quarter writing portfolios were sent home for parent perusal. Parents were asked to review children's writing and provide feedback on the "Parent Reflection Form" (Appendix H). Of 37 responses, 23 indicated "considerable improvement," 13 indicated "some improvement," and one response was "no change." Results seem to indicate that many parents recognized significant growth in children's writing skills.

Additionally, parent comments on portfolio work reflected much satisfaction with student progress. Representative comments include: "I didn't realize that was what she wanted to be in the future.", "He is really putting true thoughts in his writing. It's so exciting.", "It combines a good story with an understanding of history and geography as well.", "She shows capability of communicating a complete story.", and "His writing portfolio made me smile while reading it."

The parent-reflection form also asked parents to select areas for improvement in the future. Nearly half of the parents polled believed spelling should be improved, one quarter desired neater printing and several were looking for more descriptive details and creativity.

The results of this parent reflection were valuable to the researchers. This data

supports previous findings that student writing skills have made noteworthy improvement. In addition, this information will be used to help structure future lessons.

An important component of the assessment process included teacher observation and anecdotal records. The researchers maintained informal journals noting mini-lessons and teacher observations of students' activity and their comments about writing.

In September, many students appeared reluctant to begin a writing assignment. They seemed unsure of themselves, lacking confidence to begin. Students hesitated to continue writing when faced with a word they could not spell. Some stories were composed of a single run-on sentence that had very little meaning.

Student's daily journal writing was initiated at the start of the school year. Early entries consisted primarily of sentences copied from the chalkboard. Students were asked to complete some sentences using their own thoughts and feelings. The option to write their own sentences was always available. However, only a few students took advantage of this opportunity.

By late October, students were demonstrating more independence and creativity in their journal entries. They appeared more relaxed and eager to write about what was meaningful to them. Many students enjoyed sharing this personal style of writing with their classmates.

At the end of each month when journals were sent home, informal parent feedback indicated enjoyment and appreciation of this activity. Many parents planned to keep these journals as momentos of second-grade.

As time went on, individual students showed considerable interest in writing, choosing this activity during free time. Stories were written at home and brought to class for sharing and peer feedback. One student asked if she could start a diary. Another student spent a considerable amount of time constructing a football roster.

The researchers observed substantial growth in many facets of writing. Stories became longer and less repetitive. There was more evidence of self-editing. Students began to see writing as a means of communicating their own ideas. They were eager to share their own writing as well as to give and receive feedback.

Presentation of Analysis of Fifth Grade Results

During the first week of September 1995, 5th-grade students were give a narrative prompt whose assigned topic dealt with writing about an exciting personal experience. The prompt was scored on a 4-point scale; a score of 1 indicated a lack of competence, a 2 indicated occasional competence, a 3 indicated frequent competence and a 4 denoted thorough competence. After scoring these papers, some obvious generalizations could be made about the fifth graders' writing abilities. Students generally had much difficulty expressing a clear main idea and supporting it with specific details. Roughly 30 percent of all students exhibited frequent to thorough competence in the area of writing conventions (the use of punctuation, spelling, capitalization and sentence structure) while 70 percent demonstrated little or no competence in this area. Finally, students exhibited a disappointing amount of creativity.

At the conclusion of this action research intervention in January, 1996, a final prompt was given to all 5th-grade students. Each class received a different prompt based upon the style of writing that was emphasized during the intervention period. One class emphasized expository writing and received the following prompt: "Write an expository paper describing your favorite animal or pet." A narrative prompt was given to the other class: "Write a paper describing your life in the fifth grade." The students' papers were then graded with the same rubric used at the beginning of the year. This rubric measures writing skills in conventions, organization and creativity, and it can be used to grade a wide variety of writing styles including expository and narrative papers. Outlined below

are the scoring results of this final prompt and related narrative text.

Figure 16

Student Writing and Main Idea

Main Idea is...	Score			
	1	2	3	4
Clear and maintained	0%	9%	35%	56%
Supported with specific details	0%	2%	30%	69%
Presented logically (along with details) (n=43)	0%	23%	40%	37%

Ninety-one percent of the 5th-grade students demonstrated frequent to apparent competence when developing and maintaining their main ideas. Papers were also evaluated as to the writer's ability of presenting specific details in a logical order when supporting the main idea. Approximately 80 percent of the writers exhibited frequent to apparent competence in this area of logically presenting specific details.

Figure 17

Student Use of Writing Convention

	Score			
	1	2	3	4
Correct punctuation is used	5%	28%	44%	23%
Correct spelling is used	2%	28%	35%	35%
Correct capitalization is used	2%	21%	35%	42%
Correct sentence structure is used	2%	19%	49%	30%

(n=43)

In the area of writing conventions, 65-85 percent of the students demonstrated frequent to apparent competence in all categories evaluated by the researchers.

Figure 18

Student Writing Creativity

	Score			
	1	2	3	4
Creative us of words and ideas	5%	40%	35%	20%

(n=43)

Student creativity revealed approximately a fifty-fifty division between the sum of the lower two scores on the rubric and the sum of the two higher scores.

Figure 19

Student Use of Writing Conventions

(I=initial prompt F=final prompt +/- = percent increase/decrease)

	Score of 1			Score of 2		
	I	F	+/-	I	F	+/-
Correct Punctuation	26%	5%	-21%	42%	28%	-14%
Correct Spelling	16%	2%	-14%	51%	28%	-23%
Correct Capitalization	16%	2%	-14%	49%	21%	-28%
Correct Sentence Structure	26%	2%	-24%	40%	19%	-21%
	Score of 3			Score of 4		
	I	F	+/-	I	F	+/-
Correct Punctuation	28%	44%	+16%	4%	23%	+19%
Correct Spelling	26%	35%	+9%	7%	35%	+28%
Correct Capitalization	28%	35%	+7%	7%	42%	+35%
Correct Sentence Structure	33%	49%	+16%	1%	30%	+29%

(n=43)

The students' use of writing conventions has improved evidenced by the increase in the frequency of 3 and 4 scores in all areas. On average, there were 28 percent more papers being given a score of 4. The decrease in the frequency of 1 and 2 scores in all measured conventions also supports the writers' improvements.

Figure 20

Student Writing and Main Idea

(I = initial prompt F = final prompt +/- = percent increase/decrease)

	Score of 1			Score of 2		
	I	F	+/-	I	F	+/-
Clear and maintained	35%	0%	-35%	35%	9%	-26%
Support with specific details	42%	0%	-42%	28%	2%	-26%
Presented logically (details)	80%	0%	-80%	28%	23%	-5%
	Score of 3			Score of 4		
	I	F	+/-	I	F	+/-
Clear and maintained	26%	35%	+9%	4%	56%	+52%
Support with specific details	26%	30%	+4%	4%	49%	+45%
Presented logically (details)	28%	40%	+12%	4%	37%	+33%

(n=43)

The greatest improvements were noted in the area of writing and supporting their main idea. Scores of 4 increased by an average of 43 percent in these three categories, while scores of one decreased an average of 39 percent.

Figure 21

Student Writing Creativity

(I = initial prompt, F = final prompt, +/- = percent increase/decrease)

	Score of 1			Score of 2		
	I	F	+/-	I	F	+/-
Creative use of words and ideas	26%	5%	-21%	68%	80%	-9%
	Score of 3			Score of 4		
	I	F	+/-	I	F	+/-
Creative use of words and ideas (n=41)	26%	35%	+9%	0%	20%	+20%

The majority of writing samples show little improvement in the area of creativity. In the initial prompt, 74 percent of the students received a score of 2 or 3. In the final prompt, 75 percent of the students received similar scores.

Students in the targeted 5th-grade classes were given the student writing interest survey (Appendix D) at the end of the intervention period. The students were asked to respond to five questions pertaining to their feelings in different settings and areas of writing. Answers to these questions required the students to make a choice from four given responses. These responses were: frustrated, I'd rather do something else, okay, and excited.

Students have indicated a desire to write. When students were asked to write in school, 93 percent indicated they felt okay or excited about the process. Forty-seven percent of the students responded with an "okay" or "excited" response when asked how they felt about writing at home.

When students were asked to help a friend with his/her writing 93 percent of the students felt okay or excited. In response to sharing their piece with an audience 70

percent now felt okay or excited. Once again students were enthusiastic about having their work published. Ninety-five percent of the students replied with "okay" or "excited."

In analyzing the data collected from the two student interest surveys, several findings were noted. In September, 1995, 83 percent of the students viewed writing negatively, whether writing at home or at school. The final interest survey revealed a change in their attitude. Ninety-three percent indicated that they felt okay or excited about writing.

When sharing their writing with others-either orally or in written form-attitudes also improved. The initial interest survey revealed that 81 percent of the students were hesitant to orally share their work. The January, 1996 interest survey results revealed that only 30 percent of the students felt uncomfortable in this area. Students have continued to respond to the idea of publishing their writing with an "excited" response.

Teacher journals were kept during the intervention. Through the researchers' observations, numerous findings were noted. Anecdotal notes were kept to be used in analysis of the intervention. Teachers established themselves as writers to the class and shared their triumphs and difficulties with them. Teachers carefully guided the students through the first month of writers workshop. This guidance was necessary due to the students inability to begin and follow through in the writing process. In September, many of the students continually asked to write with a partner. Researchers addressed this issue by providing additional one-on-one guidance. Researchers noted that organizational skills needed to be improved. Students did not have difficulty beginning a piece and were often excited about their ideas, however, they could not develop or expand on their initial ideas. They were quick to abandon their work. Researchers felt it necessary to provide several graphic organizers (Appendices W and X) to help them develop their stories.

Researchers found that during the second week of the intervention, their students

did not internalize the steps in the writing process. During this first month, additional time was spent during each writing session to review these steps. A chart was displayed to remind the students what steps needed to be taken once a written piece was completed. Students frequently referred to the chart as their model when working through the writing process.

Once teachers began conferencing with students on their completed pieces, the teachers agreed that the focus of the mini-lessons needed to be on grammar and organizational skills. Teachers developed mini-lessons that provided both guided and independent practice for students.

Students were allowed to share their writings with others in a variety of ways. One means of sharing their writing involves students paraphrasing their papers to the teacher. Initially this process seemed stilted and cumbersome, however, as time progressed this paraphrasing process got students to think and reflect on their writing. Another possible means of sharing was developed enabling students to receive oral input from other students or teachers.

Students who participated in this process excitedly shared their work with others. Normally students did not receive feedback until after either self-evaluating, peer editing, or teacher conferencing. These approaches helped students in their sequencing, story development, and use of details. Writing workshop often ended with group share time and students reacted in an enthused and attentive manner. Students freely expressed positive feedback to the author.

Status of the class was introduced to the students during the first week of the intervention. After several weeks of implementation, this procedure was abandoned for several reasons. In one class it was found to be time consuming and without any worthwhile benefits. In the other class it was abandoned because mini-lessons became

quite lengthy allowing little time for writing workshop. Students and teachers were anxious to begin their work and the status of the class seemed to be unnecessary. In the latter class, once the status of the class procedure was eliminated, students still felt compelled to explain what they were working on, or why they abandoned a piece, etc. After 6 weeks of not taking status of the class, the teachers felt it necessary to resume this procedure. It helped both students and teachers keep track of their writing progress. Teachers found it important to make comments such as, "You were searching for a topic for two days now ... start wrapping it up and choose an idea and start writing."

When students began the intervention in September, they were allowed to free write, that is, write on what ever they wanted. Some students had difficulty with this process. For these students, teachers used a variety of means to stimulate ideas for writing. These resources included: newspapers, books, story starters, binders with seasonal topics, story impressions, works of art, poetry, etc.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Second Grade Writing workshop was the intervention used by the researchers to improve writing skills and related attitudes in 2nd-and 5th-grade students. Over a period of five months, from September, 1995 to January, 1996, the intervention produced compelling results.

Writing prompts, self-reflection forms, portfolio assessment, and teacher observation provided needed data at the 2nd-grade level. Researchers believe these findings indicate that the targeted students have made significant gains in the areas of writing mechanics, organization, and focus. Student growth is evident in the interpretation of this data.

The high level of student involvement presented a positive outcome of the intervention. Students were actively engaged in writing what was meaningful to them.

The processes of self-editing and self-reflection gave students insight into their own growth as writers. A great deal of interaction was apparent as students participated in peer editing techniques. This was an important source of feedback for them. The increased amount of time spent sharing original works, both in small and large groups, seemed to have stimulated imagination and enthusiasm within the class.

Some minor concerns about this program arose during the intervention period. The amount of time devoted to writing workshop affected time spent on other areas of the curriculum. It was difficult to maintain a balance of curricula needs. Another issue arose during the revision process when at individual conferences on writing, students were sometimes reluctant to change their own wording or sequence of ideas. The handling of fragile egos was a very time consuming aspect of the program. While pride of ownership is encouraged, the researchers also believe correct form is a desired outcome.

An interesting phenomenon was noted in the area of spelling when many of the students perceived themselves as making great advances in spelling. Data gathered from writing prompts, parent feedback, and teacher observation suggests otherwise. When compared to other areas, growth in spelling was minimal. Students did not make the correlation between weekly spelling test grades and daily written work. They assumed perfect spelling test scores meant they were good spellers. The use of inventive spelling encourage creativity and flow of thought, often at the expense of correct form. In the scoring of student writing samples, researchers placed more emphasis on readability than on correct spelling. This problem could be addressed in future research.

Strategies used in the writing workshop approach produced many positive results. This intervention could be a valuable tool to educators seeking to improve writing skills.

The researchers intend to continue using this program for the remainder of the school year and will implement it again in the fall.

The researchers recognize that 2nd-grade students are still emerging as writers. written work often emulates the spoken word. Seven and 8-year-old children have a tendency to write like they talk. Stories often ramble, and the meaning is lost. Development in writing is an on-going process. The intervention has provided a basic foundation for future growth.

Fifth grade. Fifth-grade teachers were able to assess students' writing performance and attitudes through the use of writing prompts and creative writing samples which had been scored using writing rubrics. Researchers also used a student interest survey given both before and after the intervention period. Students were asked to reflect on their own writings. Lastly, both teachers and students observations and comments were recorded in teachers journals. Researchers noted significant gains in the areas of using conventions correctly and improvements in the area of using details to support their main ideas. Students' attitudes toward writing revealed a heightened excitement and enthusiasm.

In one fifth grade class it was concluded that status of the class did not provide much useful information. However, it was noted by the other 5th-grade class that status of the class needed to be included daily as a means of helping students remain on task. It also holds students accountable for their writing time.

Mini-lessons are a vital part of writing workshop because through these lessons students were taught the procedures of writing workshop and the writing process. Mini-lessons allowed teachers the opportunity to address common grammatical mistakes commonly found in the students' writings.

Students reactions to the editing process ranged from ambivalent to enthusiastic. Those students who seemed ambivalent focused on mistakes in spelling and punctuation rather than on content, and had a rather disinterested attitude in completing the paperwork involved. For many others, however, the process was viewed enthusiastically and as a

beneficial step in the writing process. Students realized their strengths and weaknesses quickly and were able to seek the appropriate means to improve their writing. This included referring to a textbook or seeking a more knowledgeable peer.

Writing workshop frequently ended with a group share time and student reaction to this step was remarkably positive. Students easily found the strengths in the works of others and expressed their praise in an honest and sincere manner. Some of the students' comments were: "I really like the dialogue. It sounded just like kids talking.", "I like the way he included everyone in the class in the story. Hearing my name made me feel good.", "That was so funny. Where do you get your ideas?", "That ending was a real surprise. I like it."

The first month of writing workshop left a feeling of frustration for both teachers and students. Students were not familiar with the process of what to do once a written piece was completed. The process of self and peer editing did not come easily for the students and resulted in some frustration. Researchers recommend that significant mini-lesson time be devoted to teaching and practicing the skills involved in the editing process.

It was also noted that some students had difficulty developing a complete and organized story. In overcoming this difficulty, it is recommended that teachers employ any of the following: graphic organizers, story impressions, KWL worksheets, and receiving feedback on their story development from either another student(s) or teacher(s).

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TEACHER CHECKLIST FOR WRITING

Use of capital letters	1	2	3
Use of periods/question marks	1	2	3
Use of complete sentences	1	2	3
Stays on topic	1	2	3
Uses different words	1	2	3
Logical sequence	1	2	3
Has a good lead	1	2	3
Has conclusion or ending	1	2	3
Verb tense changes	1	2	3
Story told from one perspective (first person third person)	1	2	3
Acceptable spelling	1	2	3

SCORE KEY

Minimal - 1 Pass - 2 High - 3

Name _____ Date _____ Score _____

WRITING - GRADE 2
SCORING RUBRIC

Score 3 High

- Student writes 5 or more complete sentences using capital letters and ending punctuation correctly
- Sentences address the topic
- A variety of words are used
- Sentences follow a logical sequence
- Has a good lead and conclusion
- Verb tense and perspective are consistent
- Very few or no spelling errors

Score 2 Pass

- Student writes some complete sentences using capital letters and ending punctuation with a few minor errors
- Most sentences stay on topic
- Some repetitive word patterns
- Some logical order
- Attempt at good lead and conclusion
- Minor errors in verb tense and/or perspective
- Spelling (both real and inventive) does not inhibit the readers understanding

Score 1 Minimal

- Student may not respond to prompt
- Student expresses self in ways that inhibit the readers understanding
- Frequent errors in capitalization
- No attempt at punctuation
- Sentences do not address the topic
- Poor word choice
- No logical order
- No lead in or concluding sentence
- Verb tense and perspective are confusing
- Does not demonstrate understanding of sound/symbol relationships or word boundaries

Name_____

Writing Interests

Writing is _____.

I would write more often if _____.

I enjoy writing _____.

I'd rather write than _____.

If you were to write your own story what would you write about?

_____

_____

NAME _____ DATE _____

WRITING SURVEY

Circle the answer choice that best matches your feelings.

1. When I think about writing in school, I feel ...

   frustrated

   I'd rather do something else

   OK

   excited

2. When I think about writing at home, I feel ...

   frustrated

   I'd rather do something else

   OK

   excited

3. If I'm asked to help a friend with his/her writing, I feel ...

   frustrated

   I'd rather do something else

   OK

   excited

4. If I'm asked to read something I've written to an audience, I feel ...

   frustrated

   I'd rather do something else

   OK

   excited

5. If I'm asked to publish something I've written, I feel ...

   frustrated

   I'd rather do something else OK excited

Appendix E

TEACHER SURVLY

1. How much time do you devote to teaching writing skills?

_____ daily _____weekly

2. How much time do your students spend on formal writing assignments, ie. composition, short stories etc.?

_____ daily _____weekly

3. How much time do your students spend writing?

_____ daily _____weekly

4. Do you feel you were well prepared in college to teach writing effectively?

yes no

5. Do you wish you had more time to devote to writing?

yes no

Appendix F

Status of the Class

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Adam					
Kara					
Rosey					
Greg					
Dan					
Christina					
Chris					
Felix					
Priya					
Lisa					
Jackie					
Maggie					
Jason					
Gabino					
Pat					
Kevin					
Amanda					
Jenny					
Kevin					
Amanie					
Gina					
Kevin					

Key to Abbreviations
D 1: First draft
D 2: Second draft
ED CON: Editing conference with the teacher, rewrite first copy of the piece
RESPONSE: Content conference
1st: Scheduled for group share
SELF-CONF: Conferring with self
S.E.: Self-editing

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Dear Parents,

In an effort to learn more about your child and to help your child learn more about himself or herself, we will be compiling a portfolio for each student.

A portfolio is a collection of a student's work which will include a variety of samples of the student's written work. Some examples of this would be creative, narrative, persuasive and expository writing assignments.

A portfolio allows students the opportunity to reflect upon their work. It will also provide a record of their developmental growth in writing. This portfolio will be a valuable tool to share with you throughout the year. It will be sent home at the end of each quarter with a request for comments on your child's work.

We look forward to seeing the progress your child will make this year in writing. Thank you for your cooperation.

The Second Grade Teachers

SECOND GRADE PARENT SURVEY FOR STUDENT WRITING PORTFOLIO

Please reflect on your student's writing samples for this quarter and answer the following questions.

1. My favorite piece is _____

   because _____

   _____.

2. I would like to see _____ work on
   (child's name)

   _____ next quarter.
   (writing skill)

3. I think my child's writing skills have shown: (circle one)

   no change some improvement considerable improvement

Please return portfolio and contents along with this form by

_____.
(date)

Appendix I

RUBRIC FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES

Title of piece _____

Main idea is clear and maintained _____

_____

Main idea is supported with specific details _____

_____

Main points and details are logically presented _____

_____

Correct punctuation is used _____

_____

Correct spelling is used _____

_____

Correct capitalization is used _____

_____

Creative use of words and ideas _____

_____

Appropriate sentence structure _____

_____

GRADING SCALE

1 Lacks of any competence
2 Occasional to minimal competence
3 Frequent competence
4 Apparent competence

TOTAL POINTS _____

NAME _____ DATE _____

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Appendix J

RUBRIC FOR ASSESSMENT OF POETRY

Main idea is clear and sustained _____

_____

Correct spelling is used _____

_____

Creative use of words and ideas _____

_____

Teacher's comments:

_____

Author's comments:

_____

- Superior work
✓ Acceptable work
- Unacceptable work

Final grade _____

NAME _____ DATE _____

Reflections on Writing

Name _____ Date _____

When I look back at the work I have done, I feel

I have gotten better in writing sentences.

using capitals and periods.

spelling.

telling a story.

telling my ideas about something.

I am really proud of

_____

_____

Next time I write I will

_____

_____

SELF EVALUATION CHECKLIST

NAME_____ DATE_____

1. Is the main idea clear? YES NO
   Name the main idea

   _____

2. Did I use some vivid words? YES NO
   If NO ..... make some changes
   Examples of vivid words _____

3. Are details used to support the main idea? YES NO
   Give an example of a supporting detail

_____

4. Is the story developed in a logical order? YES NO

5. Check for correct punctuation YES NO

6. Check for correct spelling YES NO
   Use a dictionary to check possible misspellings.

7. This first draft must be neat and legible for peer editing.

Appendix M

Proofreader's Checklist

Author's Name _____ **Editor's Name** _____

Directions: Carefully read the story to yourself. Look for any mistakes. Put a + or a - next to each item. A + will show that part of the story is correct. A - will show that corrections need to be made.

☐ The author's name is on the paper.

☐ The story has a title.

☐ Each sentence is a complete thought.

☐ Each sentence begins with a capital letter.

☐ Each sentence ends with a period or a question mark.

☐ No sentence begins with "And" or "Because".

☐ Put others before I (Mom, dad, and I).

☐ Names are capitalized.

Now tell one thing the author did well or that you liked about the story.

_____

_____

Form C

THINGS _____ CAN DO AS A WRITER

PEER EDITING

Authors Name _____

Editors Name _____

What I liked best about the paper _____

_____

_____

What I thought was a good sentence or word_____

_____

_____

A question I have about the paper _____

_____

Name _____ Date _____

PEER EDITING

Peer editor _____

1. What is the author's main idea?

_____

2. Help the author by finding any spelling mistakes. Corrections are:

_____

3. Help the author by finding any mistakes using capital letters. Make corrections in the writing piece. _____ (initials of peer)

4. Help the author by finding any mistakes using punctuation marks. Make corrections in the writing piece. _____(initials of peer)

5. Can you find a sentence fragment?

EXAMPLE OF SENTENCE FRAGMENT:

The old fashioned clock on the wall.

Help the author **FIX** the sentence fragment.

The old fashioned clock on the wall was made by Grandpa.

_____ (initials of peer)

6. Can you find a run-on sentence?

EXAMPLE OF A RUN-ON SENTENCE:

Mary ran into the house and asked if she could go swimming with her friends and then she wanted to know if she could have these friends over for dinner and Mary promised to help clean up the table after dinner.

Help the author **FIX** the run-on sentence.

Mary ran into the house and asked if she could go swimming with her friends. She wanted to know if she could have these

swimming friends over for dinner later. Mary promised to help clean up the table after dinner.

_____(initials of peer)

If you find a run-on sentence please highlight it in the piece and fix it on a separate sheet of paper.

7. Is this writing piece clear? _____
If *NO*, give the author suggestions for improvements.

_____
Signature of author

_____
Signature of peer editor

68b

Student Writing Sample

Name _____ Date _____

Writing Situation : Tell about a memorable winter experience that you had this year.

Directions for Writing

Appendix B

NAME _____ DATE _____

Write a paper describing your life in the Fifth Grade.

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Name _____

Write an expository paper describing your favorite animal or pet.

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REFLECTIONS ON WRITING

NAME _____ DATE _____

My thoughts on Writers' Workshop: _____

_____

_____

_____

When I reflect on my writing abilities, I feel I have become a

better writer in the following ways: _____

_____

_____

I am really proud of the writing piece entitled:

_____

These are my reasons why I feel so proud of that particular work:

_____

_____

My future goals in writing are: _____

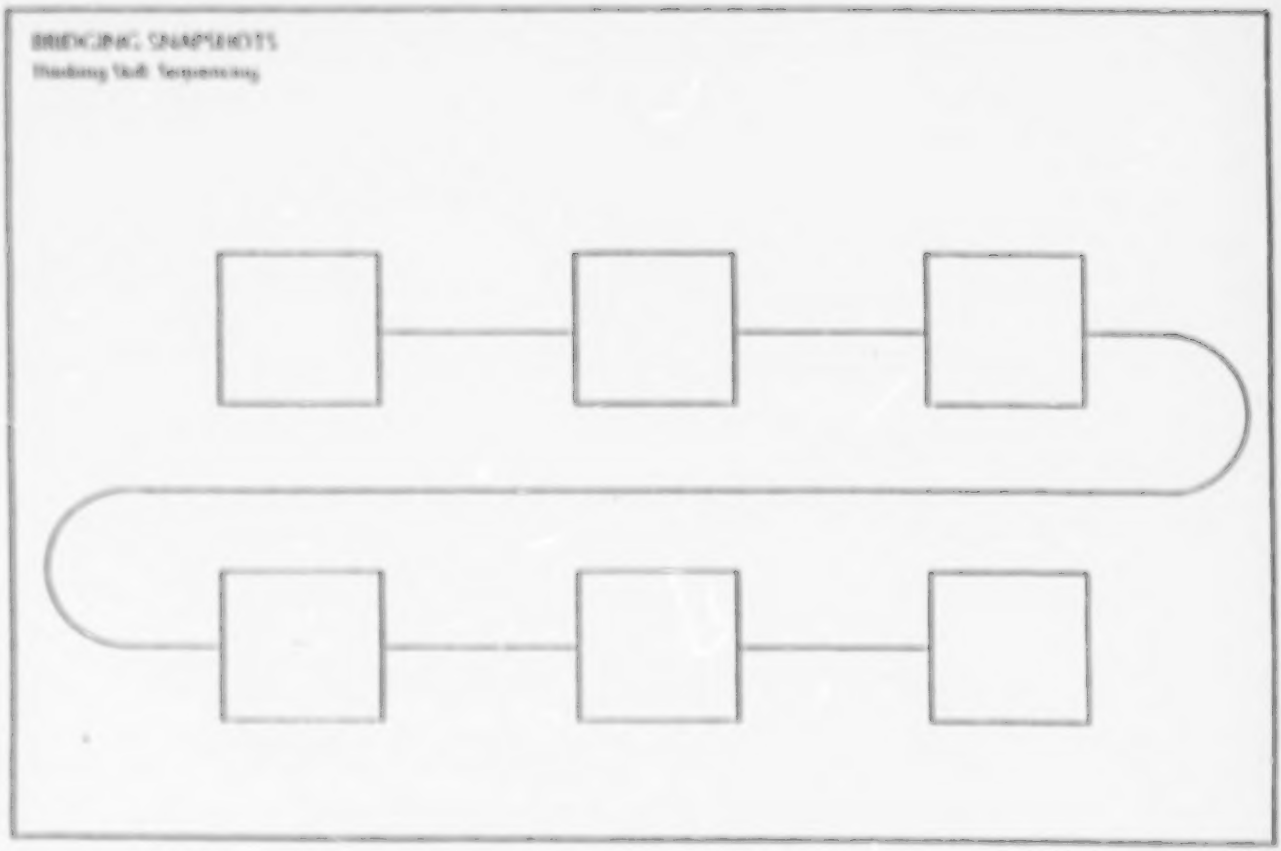
_____

_____

MY IDEAS FOR WRITING

TITLE	DATES

Appendix X



Appendix X